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Explaining the Democratic Anchorage of Governance Networks

Evidence from Four European Countries

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ABSTRACT

Advances in understanding the democratic anchorage of governance networks require carefully designed and contextually grounded empirical analysis that take into account contextual factors. The article uses a conjectural framework to study the impact of the national democratic milieu on the relationship between network governance and representative institutions in four European countries: the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The article shows that the distinction between majoritarian and consensus democracy as well as the varying strength of voluntary associations are important contextual factors that help explain cross-national differences in the relationship between governance networks and representative institutions. We conclude that a context of weak associationalism in majoritarian democracies facilitates the instrumentalization of networks by government actors (United Kingdom), whereas a more complementary role of governance networks prevails in

consensus democracies (Switzerland). However, in consensus democracies characterized by a context of strong associationalism (the Netherlands and Denmark), the spread of governance networks in public policy making is likely to lead to more substantial transformations of the democratic processes.

In recent decades, the role and function of governance networks—defined as “public policy making and implementation through a web of relationships between government, business and civil society actors” (Klijn, 2008, p. 511)—has attracted considerable attention. In the 1990s, a first generation of governance network research explained how this form could be distinguished from hierarchical and market approaches and analyzed how and under what conditions it contributed to the production of effective governance. Recently, a second generation of research has examined the democratic impact of governance networks and the extent to which they have “democratic anchorage,” that is, a system of metagovernance regulated by elected politicians (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005). However, most empirical research into the democratic consequences of governance networks has been undertaken in the context of a single country (Skelcher, 2007). The absence of cross-national comparison means that scholars are unable to establish the extent to which there are regional or global uniformities (e.g., whether network governance inevitably reduces transparency of public policy) or, conversely, whether the institutionalized norms and practices of democracy in individual countries have a mediating effect (e.g., by fostering greater citizen engagement in one country rather than another).

This article reports on an initial comparative cross-national study of the democratic consequences of governance networks. It was designed both to generate new knowledge and to stimulate colleagues to undertake similar multicountry research. Cross-national comparative research is important for the study of governance networks and democracy, as in other fields, because it helps increase the critical edge of scholarship (Blondel, 2005). It challenges researchers by questioning the findings and taken-for-granted assumptions from single-country studies and helps the field move from generalized statements to a more refined perspective that can accommodate variation in the institutionalized features of “what democracy means” and “how we do democracy” in different countries.

Our comparative research strategy starts from a consideration of the relationship between governance networks and representative democracy. We focus on representative democracy because it is the ideal underpinning the institutional arrangements in most countries claiming to be democratic, including the four countries that we study. We use a conjectural framework to formulate the possible general relationships between governance networks and representative democracy and then refine these into propositions that refer

to the democratic milieu in each of our case study countries: Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. By democratic milieu, we mean the collectively shared meanings and practices of democracy in that country, which is, as we discuss, a somewhat broader concept than the more commonly used idea of “political culture.” Then, we present a country-by-country analysis within this overall framework and end by drawing comparative conclusions concerning the relationship between democratic milieu and the democratic anchorage of governance networks.

FOUR CONJECTURES—AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework is based on four conjectures about the relationships between representative democracy and governance networks (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). Conjectures are provisional theories that offer a plausible explanation of the research problem and provide a basis from which further investigation and theorizing can proceed. The use of conjectures provides a helpful way of exploring a problem in which there are limited data or incomplete understandings of the variables involved and their relationships. The current empirical knowledge about the democratic anchorage of governance networks is such that the use of conjectures seems appropriate. In sum, there are four conjectures about the relationship between governance networks and representative democracy: namely, the incompatibility conjecture, the complementarity conjecture, the transitional conjecture, and the instrumental conjecture (see Table 1).

The Incompatibility Conjecture

The incompatibility conjecture posits that representative democracy and governance networks conflict because each is predicated on a different set of institutional rules. Sørensen (2006) identified four issues in which representative democracy and governance networks collide. First, governance networks challenge the sovereign power of the elected body because they depend on a high level of autonomy. Second, governance networks are constituted on a functional and not a territorial logic of representation. Third, public administrators tend to become policymakers in and through their participation in governance networks. Fourth, governance networks undermine the classical institutional separation between the public and the private sphere in traditional theories of representative democracy by bringing together stakeholders from state, market, and civil society.

This approach to governance networks emphasizes the closed and compartmentalized nature of decision making in separate policy sectors and the limited accessibility to these by nonspecialized and poorly organized interest groups. The relatively closed and sector-divided character of the decision making in

Table 1. Four Conjectures on the Relationship of Governance Networks to Democratic Institutions

Conjecture	1: Incompatible	2: Complementary	3: Transitional	4: Instrumental
<i>Characteristics</i>				
Relationship of governance networks to representative democracy	Governance networks challenge legitimacy and decision rules of representative democratic institutions.	Governance networks provide democratic institutions with additional linkages to society.	Governance networks offer greater flexibility and efficiency than representative democratic institutions, they will increase as the primary mode of societal decision making, at the expense of representative democratic institutions.	Governance networks provide a means for representative democratic institutions to increase their authority in the face of societal complexity.
View of democracy	Representative democracy should be the primary means of societal decision making.	Representative democracy has primacy for decisions affecting fundamental values, but for other types of decisions it can coexist with deliberative and participative democracy introduced through governance networks.	Representative democracy is being replaced by other modes of societal decision making that reflect plural weighting of values in a diverse world.	Representative democracy reasserts itself, by working through procedures that are less subject to public scrutiny and accountability, and emphasising agreement over outputs rather than inputs to the decision process.

View of elected politicians	Politicians are decisive at crucial points, and their electoral authority should not be undermined by introducing alternative democratic modes.	Politicians try to cope with complexity by using networks to increase involvement in policy formulation, thus strengthening input legitimacy; but at the same time their electoral authority gives them a special role in the goal setting process and means that they should be the final arbiters between competing views.	Politicians within a representative democratic system are unable to accommodate the complexities of the modern world; they should act as metagovernors (mediators and referees).	Politicians try to cope with complexity by using governance networks as a means to control actors and realise policy, by emphasising output legitimacy and should be more “emphatic” to other actors.
View of accountability	Primary accountability lies with the elected political officials (classical accountability).	Accountability is shared between political office holders and other actors, multiple forms of accountability are added to the classical political accountability (performance indicators, boards, etc.) (shared accountability).	Accountability is in the first place achieved by checks and balances in the decision-making process, by securing the openness of decision making and enhancing transparency of decision making by multiple forms of accountability (constructed accountability).	Accountability is secured by the dominant role of elected politicians; other forms of accountability (like performance indicators) are used by political official holders to control other actors and the decision-making process as a whole (instrumental accountability). Decision making is complex, but takes place under the “shadow of hierarchy.”
View of decision making	Decision making takes place in closed networks that lack sufficient steering by or accountability to representative democratic institutions.	The increasing complexity of decision making requires governance networks in order to bring relevant actors into the process; politicians should focus on the main decisions, and devolve lower level decisions to governance networks.	Modern society inherently is characterised by networks and complex decision making with interdependencies; the information revolution and globalisation create new societal complexities; institutions created in the age of democracy are no longer adequate.	

Source: Klijn and Skelcher (2007).

governance networks means that it is primarily sector specialists and other experts who participate in the networks at the expense of elected politicians (Heisler, 1974; Koppenjan, Ringeling, & te Velde, 1987). Consequently, the incompatibility conjecture focuses on the way governance networks interfere with the principles of the primacy of politics and the political accountability of ministers and other elected, executive officeholders.

The Complementarity Conjecture

The second conjecture suggests that governance networks engage more actors in the policy process than the institutions of representative democracy. As such, it can be seen as a means to enhance the level of citizen participation in representative democracy. This kind of stakeholder involvement is viewed as valuable due to a new complexity of the problems that modern governance processes address (Pierre & Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1988). There are two types of complexity. The first is a function of the issues facing governments such as environmental problems, security, and labor market issues (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). In the second, new policy agendas are superimposed on the earlier cleavages in society around which constitutional arrangement in advanced liberal states were designed (Lijphart, 1999). Among these new cleavages are religion, ethnicity, cultural orientation, and sexuality. All tend to challenge the notions of shared citizenship that are the cornerstone of legitimacy of representative democracy.

Governance networks are viewed as a valuable flexible institutional design to mediate the relationship of representative democracy with citizens and other parties. Hence, governance networks provide quasigovernmental institutions within which different groups can take direct part in decision-making processes that directly affect them in close collaboration with public actors. By doing so, governance networks are said to contribute to democracy in several ways (Fung & Wright, 2001; Papadopoulos, 2000). First, the creation of new institutions offers greater opportunities for participation in all phases of the policy process. Thereby they help to raise the level of public engagement as well as the level of information that governments have about the citizens' actual needs and preferences. Second, governance networks negotiate outcomes that transcend partial preferences. Finally, governance networks help to build social capital and political efficacy government (McLaverty, 2002). The complementary view thus sees governance networks as a valuable addition to representative democracy.

The Transitional Conjecture

This conjecture proposes a general transformation of the governance processes in Western democracies that affects the functioning of representative

democracy in fundamental ways. Governance processes increasingly take the form of complicated negotiation processes in which public policy problems are ill-defined, require novel solutions, affect many values, and draw on knowledge that is dispersed (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Theories of deliberative democracy are seen as a central contribution to develop a new interactive form of democracy that relies on the active involvement of citizens and other societal actors in order to obtain legitimacy (Papadopoulos, 2003). The current transition phase inevitably produces tensions between old and new forms of democratic governance. This tension emerges among other things as a tension between representative democracy and governance networks (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Elected politicians fear that interactive decision making threatens their primacy as decision makers while governance networks view governments as a threat toward their autonomy and capacity for self-governance.

The transitional conjecture argues that this tension can be reduced through a reformulation of the roles of elected politicians from being sovereign rulers to becoming metagovernors that frame self-governing processes in a way that gives an overall direction and promotes the democratic quality of self-governing processes (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Sørensen, 2006). From the transition perspective, democracy becomes more a societal model than a representational model. Democracy becomes a process of deliberation that has to be organized and guided carefully to enhance its open character and supported by multiple forms of accountability. In the transitional conjecture, democracy is a design task to be implemented in real life practice of governance networks. It is both a high ideal but also a pragmatic task.

The Instrumental Conjecture

The instrumental conjecture views governance networks as a medium through which powerful governmental actors can increase their capacity to shape and deliver public policy in a complex world. Governance networks provide an instrument to structure the inputs to and outcomes from the policy process so that their alignment with dominant agendas is increased. Theoretically, the instrumental approach can be located either in a notion of local elite strategies or the wider debate about changing forms of social regulation in a neoliberal context. In either case, the instrumental perspective starts from the premise that the interests of governmental actors are relatively immutable and exist prior to any wider engagement with stakeholders. Governance networks provide a means of reinforcing these dominant interests (through the input structure) and realizing them (through the output structure). In contrast, both the complementary and transitional approaches assume that interests are transitive, being refined and redefined through dialogue and deliberation between elected politicians and their officials, on the one hand, and the various publics, on the other.

In terms of this conjecture, governance networks offer a means for elected politicians to realize their policy platforms through the application of governance networks in an instrumental fashion. For example, the use of such networks to promote vertical linkages that cut across multiple tiers of government can enhance local delivery of national policy intent. Governance networks provide resources to enable government to extend and reproduce its policy agenda into a new arena and enhance the possibilities of realizing its broader goals (Le Galès, 2001). In this conjecture, accountability is secured by the strong involvement of political office holders who remain responsible. Other accountability measures (such as performance management) are designed to support the accountability of the central political stakeholder.

The Power of Elected Politicians

The four conjectures each provide their own understanding of the relationship between governance networks and elected politicians. With regard to the incompatibility and instrumental conjectures, they both assume that power is associated with the authority of elected politicians who make strategic decisions that entail a cascade of lower-order decisions for other actors in the network. This is either because elected politicians are part of representative institutions that aggregate the will of the citizens (as is argued by the incompatibility conjecture) or because elected politicians are endowed with qualities that enable them legitimately to act as principals shaping the incentive structures in governance networks (as is argued by the instrumental conjecture). The remaining two conjectures portend different views regarding the power of elected politicians. The complementarity conjecture considers that while ultimate decision authority remains with elected politicians, governance networks facilitate the sharing of this authority with various societal groups who, in turn, provide elected politicians with support, knowledge, and implementation capacity. This exchange between elected politicians and societal groups is seen as a basis for the enhancement of civic engagement and of pluralism in policy making. Finally, the transitional conjecture emphasizes that actors in governance networks strongly depend on each other and that this situation strengthens veto powers rather than power to achieve positive goals. Thus, elected politicians are certainly not the only powerful actor in governance networks and not necessarily the most powerful ones. Their power is dissolved and relocated from the institutions of representative democracy to the governance network itself.

DEMOCRATIC MILIEU AS AN EXPRESSION OF CONTEXT

The four conjectures are useful in sharpening theoretical thinking and in guiding empirical research into the relationship between governance networks

and representative democracy. However, it is obvious that they are largely insensitive to contextual elements that may influence the relationship between governance networks and representative democracy and thus the likeliness of the various conjectures to occur in different settings.

Democratic Milieus and the Four Conjectures

There is a long strand of research in comparative political sociology to show that the relationship between the state and civil society varies across national borders (Badie & Birnbaum, 1994). Any cross-national examination of the relationship between societal groups and elected politicians must, therefore, be able to single out the influence that the nature of the national context might have on this relationship. We capture this contextual influence via the notion of “democratic milieu,” which points to the collectively shared meanings and practices attributed by the involved actors to the features of the organization or institution with which they are associated. This captures something of the legacy of historically rooted institutions located in a specific spatial or policy setting, as well as the possibilities emergent in new practices (Farrelly & Skelcher, 2010). In addition, it concerns the ways in which their organization or institution relates to and is conceived to interact with other organizations and institutions that make up the national polity. Therefore, cross-national variations of democratic milieu need to account for differences regarding the interactions between these two actor categories and their respective organizations or institutions.

Lijphart’s (1999) distinction between consensus and majoritarian patterns of democracy enables the operationalization of cross-national variations of the democratic milieu. Lijphart argued that democracies should be distinguished by looking at variables that tend, on the one hand, to favor majoritarian decision making thanks to concentration of power or, on the other hand, require consensual decision making due to power being shared between a plurality of different actors. The relevance of Lijphart’s distinction for the question under scrutiny here is clear: In majoritarian democracies, power is concentrated within representative institutions—hence, lies with elected politicians—while in consensus democracies, power is more dispersed not only within representative institutions but also between representative institutions and societal actors such as interest groups. With respect to the relationships between governance networks and representative institutions, we can expect that in majoritarian democracies, the (traditionally strong) power of elected politicians is more at stake than in consensual democracies in which one is used to shared power between elected politicians and other societal actors. In other words, we can assume that the described incompatibility and instrumental conjectures are more likely to be found in majoritarian democracies, while the complementarity and transitional conjectures are more likely in consensual democracies.

Table 2. **Democratic Milieus and the Four Conjectures**

Pattern of democracy	Associationalism	
	Weak	Strong
Majoritarian	Instrumental conjecture	Incompatibility conjecture
Consensual	Complementarity conjecture	Transitional conjecture

Further, we argue that the level of social capital is a crucial characteristic of the democratic milieu. Putnam (1993) argued that the nature of the civic community is important to democracy in the sense that strong engagement of citizens in secondary associations (i.e., organizations outside state institutions) tends to foster values and behavior that are crucial to making democracy work, namely political equality, solidarity, trust, and tolerance. So the general strength of the associational nexus in a given society can also be assumed to shape relationships between governance networks (as they involve nonstate actors) and representative institutions. A context of strong associationalism confers governance networks an independent power base that enables them to resist control and direction from representative institutions. Instead, a context characterized by associational weakness puts representative institutions into advantage. Hence, we propose that in a democratic milieu characterized by strong associationalism governance networks will more likely be “at eye level” with representative institutions, with whom they can either be in conflict (incompatibility conjecture) or negotiate effectively to transform decision making and redefine democratic practice (transitional conjecture). On the other hand, in a context of weak associationalism, it will be easier for representative institutions to dominate governance networks (instrumental conjecture) or steer them in a way to engage civil society more fully in public policy making (complementarity conjecture). Taken together, these considerations suggest that four types of democratic milieus should be distinguished, in which the four conjectures are more or less likely to prevail (see Table 2).

Four Countries and Their Democratic Milieu

From the previous considerations, clear hypotheses can be formulated regarding contextual influences on the relationship between governance networks and representative institutions in the four countries under scrutiny here: the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Denmark, and the Netherlands. We selected these four countries because they provide sufficient variety to enable comparison within the model set out, and in each, the authors had been investigating these issues in their own nationally oriented and comparative research projects.

Regarding patterns of democracy, Lijphart argued that the United Kingdom and its Westminster model is a good example of a majoritarian democracy and that Switzerland lies at the opposite pole as a typical consensus democracy

Table 3. **Democratic Milieus of Countries Under Scrutiny**

Pattern of democracy	Associationalism	
	Weak	Strong
Majoritarian	United Kingdom	Netherlands Denmark
Consensual	Switzerland	

(1999, p. 250). Denmark can be classified as a consensual democracy with a distinctively Scandinavian culture of consensus and structures for conciliation. The Netherlands is more difficult to position. According to Lijphart, it has gradually moved away from the consensual style since the 1970s (1999, p. 256), which is all the more remarkable as most other countries in continental Europe (including Denmark) have moved in the opposite direction in the same period. But other authors have argued that the dominant style is still very consensual and oriented toward negotiation (Hendriks & Toonen, 2000). It is also clear that the Netherlands, with its proportional representation, coalition governments, and tradition of consensus is a far weaker example of a majoritarian democracy than the United Kingdom. However, we still regard the Netherlands as more majoritarian than Denmark. This classification is corroborated by a recent analysis that also found Denmark to be more consensual than the Netherlands (Vatter & Bernauer, 2009, p. 352).

To measure the strength of associationalism in these four countries, we follow the approach used by recent cross-national studies on membership in voluntary organizations (Dekker & van den Broek, 2005; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). We use item B13-19 in the European Social Survey 2006, in which respondents were asked whether, in the previous 12 months, they had worked in an organization or association that was neither a political party nor an action group to determine the average national ratio of active membership in voluntary associations. For all the 26 countries covered in the 2006 European Social Survey, 14 percent of the respondents declared active involvement in voluntary associations in the 12 months before the survey. While the results for the United Kingdom (9%) and Switzerland (13%) are below this overall average, the results for Denmark (25%) and the Netherlands (24%) are clearly above. The four countries under scrutiny can hence be considered to present four distinct democratic milieus (see Table 3).

THE FOUR COUNTRIES COMPARED

The empirical analysis in this article uses an expert informant approach. Each country case is written by a scholar with extensive experience of the literature

on and research into governance networks and democracy in each country. The brief was to write a case study that used the available evidence to discuss the origins of governance networks, how they relate to the democratic milieu, and the role of elected politicians in networks and a conclusion that relates back to the four conjectures. Given space constraints, the sections are inevitably brief and are intended to provide an overview of the key features of what are quite complex processes in each country. References offer additional evidence and access to the domestic debates regarding the evolution and relationship between governance networks and representative democracy.

United Kingdom

Origins of Governance Networks

The significance of governance networks in the United Kingdom was identified by Marsh and Rhodes (1992) and their collaborators in studies of the structured incorporation of business, labor, and other special interest groups in national-level policy formulation. The period of Conservative government in the 1980s and 1990s not only dislocated these embedded patterns of relationships but also began a process of building local-level collaboration in policy implementation in which business and citizen interests were given greater weight relative to local government through their formal incorporation into new institutions of governance (Skelcher, 2004).

Since the late 1990s, there has been a substantial increase in stakeholder engagement with government at (and more recently between) all levels of government. Newman (2001) located the momentum for governance networks within the discourse of modernization, a New Labour project to recast political, economic, social, and cultural relations in UK society. A broad pro-modernization coalition promotes the widespread use of governance networks. This coalition reflects congruence between the interests of national government in promoting collaborative and inclusive policy making, managers who see advantages in terms of their increased authority and discretion, and political actors who recognize the opportunities of finding new ways of engaging with local communities (Stoker, 2004; Sullivan, 2004).

Governance networks are often consolidated into a partnership, that is, a board or committee that forms the node in each wider network (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). Partnerships cover a wide range of public policy issues, including urban regeneration, crime reduction, health improvement, environmental sustainability, and supporting asylum seekers and refugees. The proliferation of governance networks across the public policy landscape has led to complaints from civil society and business who have experienced considerable difficulties in mustering the capacity to respond to all of the potential partnership opportunities (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister,

2006; Sullivan, 2008). Nonetheless, policymakers' appetite for governance networks has not abated, with increasing attention being paid to developing strategic level networks whose role is to determine and deliver local policy outcomes via formalized agreements with national government.

The Relationship to the English Democratic Milieu

The United Kingdom fits neatly into Lijphart's (1999) description of a majoritarian system. It is a unitary state in which power remains concentrated in the hands of the center affording national representative institutions significant influence. This pattern has repeated itself in the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales from 1999. Importantly, the constitutional status of local government is not safeguarded, and there is a long tradition of central government intervention to reshape the governance of local affairs (Stewart, 2000). In this context, the development of governance networks can be understood within the terms of the instrumental conjecture with local governance networks providing a key route for the delivery of national policy objectives.

Governance networks or partnerships seldom require national legislation and are formed with little public debate. A powerful incentive to their creation has been the creation by national government of special funds, accessible only by partnerships of public, business and civil society actors. National policy also emphasizes the engagement of stakeholders in governance networks, including special funding for the capacity building of community representatives. The need for this kind of intervention could be attributed to the relatively weak associationalism in the United Kingdom, although its impact has been variable (Taylor, 2003). In keeping with the instrumental conjecture, governance networks in the United Kingdom have traditionally been subject to minimal constitutional safeguards (Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005). The strongest forms of accountability are to higher levels of government, for public funding, and the delivery of performance targets. But, in contrast, general democratic oversight is limited.

However, the UK case also provides evidence to support the complementary conjecture. Stakeholder engagement is based on a view of society segmented into groups organized around different interests and an understanding of democracy that consists of these interests being directly represented in public policy making rather than aggregated and mediated by elected politicians. Such stakeholders are understood to be structured in terms of business, non-profit, and community sectors, the latter being further divisible on locational, ethnicity, identity, faith, and other grounds. However the ability of governance networks to deliver improved engagement is limited. Problems arise from the way "publics" are constituted by the state for inclusion in governance networks (Barnes, Newman, Knops, & Sullivan, 2003; Taylor, 2003) and from the processes of incorporation that can result when citizen actors come into contact with state-led institutions (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2004).

The Power of Elected Politicians in Governance Networks

Research evidence records widespread disconnection between local politicians and local partnerships (Geddes, 2006; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006). A strong managerialist discourse locates partnerships as part of an implementation structure rather than as policy-making bodies (Skelcher et al., 2005). Consequently, elected politicians are framed as higher order decision makers (metagovernors) in relation to lower order partnerships in keeping with the features of the instrumental conjecture. The resulting structural gap enables public managers to exercise considerable discretion, including over the design of the institution, its forms of democratic anchorage, and the definition of the publics to be included (Barnes et al., 2003). In practice, this metagoverning role was quite weak until the mid-2000s when a national reappraisal of the role of elected local politicians resulted in national policy endorsement of their role as strategic leaders of local partnerships (e.g., Communities and Local Government, 2006; Sullivan, 2008). This shift generated mixed reactions from other stakeholders, many of whom acknowledge the *primus inter pares* role of local government but are also apprehensive about what they perceive to be a resurgence of local government dominance.

Conclusion

The predominant aspects of the democratic milieu that this case illustrates are those of the informal constitution that can be changed on a pragmatic basis. The United Kingdom is not a constitutional polity. The institutions of governance are not designed with reference to universal democratic principles. In a unitary state, where local institutions are not protected by a constitution, this structure means that there is considerable scope for national government to change and adapt as it sees fit. Hence, the instrumental conjecture predominates in our analysis.

But alongside this is also the complementary conjecture. There is clear evidence of the opening up of local decision making to a wider spread of actors, even if there are difficulties in this process. The combination of instrumental and complementary is not accidental. Modernization as a political strategy requires the reshaping of local governmental institutions to affect both enhanced delivery of public policy and greater legitimacy from stakeholders. The resultant governance networks and their partnership nodes provide the constitutional flexibility to enable both the managerialization necessary for the policy delivery and participation necessary for legitimation. This process happens under the broad oversight of representative democratic institutions at local level, expressed through their managers and with limited direct involvement by elected local politicians.

Switzerland

Origins of Governance Networks

The Swiss state is generally considered the prototype of a weak state (Badie & Birnbaum, 1994). As a corollary, governance networks have always played an important role in policy making, both with respect to formulation and implementation. At the national level, corporatist delegation of state authority to private interest governments (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985) is a long-standing feature in many policy fields, ranging from the regulation of vocational education to various aspects of agricultural policy. At the subnational level, and especially in social policy, there is an equally long-standing tradition of subsidiarity, featuring the autonomous delivery of public services by nonprofit organizations subsidized by the state (Bütschi & Cattachin, 1993).

These traditions have strongly evolved since the 1980s, in the wake of a neoliberal reform agenda. Private interest governments have been dismantled in many sectors, transforming corporatist entrenchments into more pluralist patterns of policy making (see Mach, 2007; Wagemann, 2005), while public-private partnerships have emerged as a core element for the delivery of public services (Schedler, 2000). Consequently, state authorities at both national and subnational levels have taken a more proactive role in their collaboration with nonprofit organizations (Bütschi & Cattachin, 1993). This shift has strengthened the role of state agencies in governance networks, vis-à-vis business or civil society associations.

The Relationship to the Swiss Democratic Milieu

Switzerland has a consensus democracy working in a culturally heterogeneous and fractionalized society. In addition, the Swiss polity is characterized by extensive direct democracy, which has brought about additional mechanisms that aim to integrate and pacify potential opposition (Neidhart, 1970). As a consequence, policy formulation at all state levels is characterized by negotiation and the search for compromise among a multitude of societal groups both outside and within representative institutions before final decisions are made in popular votes (see Sciarini, 2007). This climate is favorable to governance networks (see Kriesi, 1995). The role of governance networks is thus best understood within the complementarity conjecture, supporting existing arrangements by extending consociational relationships into new policy fields outside the traditional realms of political negotiation.

The second element of the Swiss democratic milieu, namely, weak associationalism, has also shaped governance networks. Faced with a low degree of civil society organization in new policy issues, state agencies have resorted to what Bütschi and Cattacin (1993) termed “reflexive subsidiarity,” that is, when

the state (financially) supports the establishment of voluntary associations, which it then invites to join governance networks and play a substantial role in the implementation of state policies. This strongly echoes the instrumental conjecture in which governance networks are seen as a resource to powerful state actors. However, closer analysis shows that even though voluntary associations are state creatures in origin, their involvement in governance networks enables them to gain sufficient momentum and autonomy to resist state intervention, and they have even been able to triumph over attempts to weaken them (Neuenschwander, 2005).

The Power of Elected Politicians in Governance Networks

Governance networks in Switzerland come in many different forms, and there are no overall rules on how actors that participate relate to one another. Transparency of governance networks is generally poor. Unlike representative institutions, there is no statutory right for public scrutiny with respect to decision-making bodies of governance networks. Case studies of drug policy, public transport, cultural policy, and water provision have shown that lines of accountability are blurred in governance networks (Kübler & Schwab, 2007). The budgetary process seems to provide the main link for connecting governance networks to both elected politicians in representative institutions as well as the electorate through direct democratic instruments (Wälti, Kübler, & Papadopoulos, 2004). Legal procedures for budget or credit approval generally stipulate a cascade of decisions by different bodies (the executive, parliament, electorate) according to the amount that is involved. Because the delivery of public policies by governance networks generally involves a transfer of public funds, the procedures for budget approval provide the main link to the democratic sphere.

These findings are in line with the dominant discourse about the role of elected politicians in public policy making. The wave of public management reform that swept Switzerland in the 1990s (re)defined the role of elected politicians. Echoing Osborne and Gaebler's (1993) famous distinction between steering and rowing, one of the characteristic features of new public management, Swiss style, consists in separating strategic aspects of decision making from operational aspects of administrative execution (Germann, 1999; Schedler, 2000). This redefines the role of the elected politicians, be they national or local: Whereas operational choices are left to the discretion of the bureaucracy (or governance networks), strategic choices are the privilege of elected politicians who are thereby transformed into metagovernors.

However, the accuracy of this view has been heavily questioned in the Swiss context. On a conceptual level, Germann (1999) refuted it as a revival of an outdated dogma from the American Progressive era according to which politics should be clearly separated from administration. Given that "the mix-

ing up of politics and administration has a long secular tradition and is deeply anchored in Swiss institutions of direct democracy” (Germann 1999, p. 209), this redefined role of elected politicians seems all the more inadequate. In a similar way, others have argued that separating strategic from operational decision making weakens representative institutions and will, ultimately, result in the repoliticizing of implementation processes (see, in particular, Knoepfel, 1996). Recent empirical research (Widmer & Rieder, 2007; Widmer & Rüegg, 2005) has shown that, indeed, elected politicians in Switzerland do not confine themselves to the role of metagovernors. Rather, they do not hesitate to behave as microgovernors by interfering in administrative processes. The public bureaucracy is often subject not only to scrutiny by elected politicians but also to governance networks that perform functions in support of particular policy programs. In the social policy field, Wälti et al. found “little evidence that governance [networks] tend to uncouple political issues from the traditional arenas of democratic legitimization and from public debate” (2004, p. 106). Reduced influence by elected politicians in governance networks has thus not been diagnosed in Switzerland. This situation is best understood within the complementarity conjecture, emphasizing that ultimate decision authority remains with elected politicians.

Conclusion

The context of negotiation democracy in a heterogeneous and fragmented society has provided a favorable climate to governance networks in Switzerland ever since. Governance networks appear as a functional addition to the existing consociational arrangements. Even though governance networks have become an instrument for the state to expand into new policy fields, there are strong limits to state discretion, as even weak voluntary associations have successfully resisted outright instrumentalization. In terms of democratic anchorage, governance networks in Switzerland are best described by the complementary conjecture. Indeed, legal procedures—especially the budgetary process—provide systematic linkages of governance networks to decision making in representative institutions. In addition, elected politicians have proved quite reluctant to embrace the new role of metagovernors foreseen by public management reforms. The evidence suggests that decisional authority of representative institutions has not been reduced by the proliferation of governance networks.

The Netherlands

The Origins of Network Governance

The Netherlands has traditionally been a society of pillars (Socialist, Protestant, Catholic, Liberal), each having its own organizational structures (political

parties, intermediate organizations) that operate relatively separately from the others (Lijphart, 1999). As in Switzerland, decision making in the Netherlands was based on a high degree of passivity and loyalty on the part of citizens and close contact between the elites of the political parties and third-sector (societal) associations. Thus, strong elite leadership by the political leaders of the pillars was combined with strong consensualism between leaders and strong associationalism, which is densely organized social life within the pillars. Implementation was left to the societal organizations in each of the political pillars, which were closely affiliated with the political parties.

This system of decision making lasted until the end of the 1960s. Since then the Netherlands has witnessed a strong secularization process, during which the traditional pillars lost their meaning (Hendriks & Toonen, 2000) and polarization increased. The growth of the welfare state resulted in groups of actors who specialize in particular sectors entering the decision-making process (Koppenjan et al., 1987; Van den Berg & Molleman, 1975; Van Putten, 1982). This process created knowledge and resource interdependencies among public, private, and semiprivate actors. In addition, there has been a growing need for integrated solutions for problems that surpass sectors. The result has been a more complex form of decision making, which can be regarded as governance networks, operating at national, regional, and local levels.

The increasing importance of governance networks is also shown by the growing number of interactive decision-making processes in Dutch municipalities and occasionally at the national level (see Denters, van Heffen, Huisman, & Klok, 2003; Edelenbos & Monninkhof, 2001). Here, stakeholders are invited to participate in the decision-making process in an early phase (before solutions are developed) (see Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000).

The Relationship to the Dutch Democratic Milieu

The evidence about the emergence of governance networks in the Netherlands, taken over the longer term, suggests that the network character of decision making increases, as does the involvement of additional actors. This trend toward governance networks also fits the Dutch political administrative system (a decentralized unitary state) in which local governments have considerable power, but there is also regular negotiation between central and local public bodies. This points to the transitional conjecture in which the already consociational democratic and political system of the Netherlands is slowly converted to something whose whole contour we cannot yet see but could be considered a network democracy.

However, there are trends that do not fit this picture and indicate the incompatibility conjecture. These include the strong call for leadership by citizens and discussion of ways to curtail the involvement of external actors

(and especially their legal rights) so that decision making on complex issues can be speeded up. These trends suggest a tension between the rules and requirements of governance networks, which focus on mutual interaction, negotiation, and the development of shared commitment by actors and the more vertical accountability structure of representational democracy (Klijn, 2008). This also fits with the trend of the past 10 years in which public confidence in political parties and political leaders has diminished and social discontent has risen (Dekker, van der Meer, Schyns, & Steenvorden, 2009).

The large number of actors involved in governance networks reduces their transparency. However, different accountability mechanisms are developed before or during decision-making processes, and democratic legitimacy is achieved in various ways, including public hearings, collective agreements on processes, and normal democratic procedures.

Governance Networks and Elected Politicians

In the formal sense, representative political institutions still hold considerable power because sooner or later most decisions have to pass these institutions, and elected city officials usually have strong positions in the networks. However, this view of a complementarity conjecture is challenged by research that shows that the authority of representational bodies is weaker than their formal position suggests (Edelenbos, 2000; Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006; Edelenbos & Monninkhof, 2001). Although political bodies are involved in designing the rules for interactive decision making, they are frequently absent from the process itself. In addition, research on environmental projects shows that there is no correlation between the involvement of political bodies or political parties and project outcomes, but there is a relatively strong correlation between the involvement of stakeholders and positive outcomes (Edelenbos, Steijn, & Klijn, 2010). This suggests that stakeholders do significantly contribute to outcomes in governance networks, and so it could be argued that, for them, networks are understood within the instrumental conjecture. This leads to a “displacement of politics” in which important decisions are framed and made in places other than in the institutions of representative government. The stronger duality installed at the turn of the century in Dutch politics, which led city and provincial councils to concentrate more on a controlling task, may have contributed to a less prominent role of elected bodies and a more prominent role of individual elected officials.

Conclusion

Superficially, the emergence of governance networks seems to fit the typical Dutch consociationalism style of policy making in which actors negotiate with one another. However, they do give political organizations and representa-

tive government a less prominent position in the whole process, even though their formal position is still strong. In that sense, the transitional conjecture seems a reasonable model to describe and explain the developments. There are also, however, signs that indicate tensions between governance networks and representative democracy, especially as the traditional pillarized model has lost significance. It is as yet unclear whether this can be explained as a sign that the transition is not always smooth or more fundamentally reflects the incompatibility conjecture.

Denmark

Origins of Governance Networks

Denmark has a long history of a very strong state and a very strong civil society (Knudsen, 1991), and governance networks have served as a means to bridge these sectors, resolve conflicts, and enhance cooperation and coordination through the shaping of negotiated agreements. In policy areas such as labor market policy and agriculture, a strong corporatist tradition of networking between the state and the relevant interest organizations has prevailed and in policy areas such as education, social services, culture, and sports, there is an even longer tradition of negotiated network cooperation between public actors and a broad variety of voluntary organizations (Bogason, 1990; 2000). However, since the beginning of the 1980s, the systematic use of governance networks has spread into new policy areas such as business, tourism, regional development, environment, health, and education, and they have become more institutionalized and legitimized (Bogason, 2001; Sørensen, 2006).

Although governance networks have a central place at the national and local levels, the role that they play varies. National networks are predominantly engaged in policy making while local networks focus on policy implementation. However, because Denmark has a constitutionally guaranteed local level of government with a considerable degree of political competence and autonomy, local governance networks are also in many instances engaged in local policy making. National and local governance networks take many different forms. Some are relatively informal while others are formal; some networks are open and inclusive while others are closed and exclusive; some are initiated from below while others are initiated from above; some are metagoverned by public authorities while others are not.

One driving force behind the growth in governance networks is a positive view of their value among leading politicians and public administrators, notably the Ministry of Finance and the Association of Danish Municipalities (Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003; Sørensen, 2006). They see the involvement of stakeholders in public governance as a means of providing more informed decisions, promoting efficient implementation by reducing stakeholder resis-

tance, and increasing governance legitimacy by improving the responsiveness of the political system vis-à-vis central stakeholders.

The Relationship to the Democratic Milieu in Denmark

Denmark is characterized not only by a strong state and a strong civil society but by a strong national and local representative democracy and a strong participatory democracy. Seen in this context, governance networks can be understood within the complementary conjecture as a way of linking national and local levels of representative democracy with various forms of democratic participation. This complementary view is expressed by a growing number of national politicians (Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003) and citizens (Andersen, Torpe, & Andersen, 2000) and in the concluding report of the Danish National Study of Power and Democracy (Togeby, Anderson, Christiansen, Jørgensen, & Vallgård, 2003).

Networks that are initiated and regulated by public authorities can also be understood to some extent within the instrumental conjecture as a new and more efficient means of implementing public policy. However, it seems to be generally accepted that to be efficient governance networks need a considerable amount of autonomy and a considerable ability to affect the outcome of the processes of public governance in which they are involved. For that reason, governance networks are not seen as neutral instruments for implementing public policies but as active coproducers of public policy that have a direct effect on the policy outcome. In other words, governance networks tend to be seen both as a form of governance and as a form of policy making that needs to be regulated democratically. Accordingly, one of the central debates in the Danish context concerns how representative democracy and democratic network participation are to complement each other.

The transparency and accountability of Danish governance networks vary considerably. Formalized governance networks tend to be more transparent and accountable than informal networks. This is, among other things, because formal networks are often metagoverned by public authorities in a way that contributes to ensuring some extent of openness and broad inclusion in their constitution and some degree of publicity and public attention. Informal governance networks are often less visible to the larger public and thus more difficult for public authorities and the larger public to hold to account. However, experience shows that deliberate efforts to metagovern informal governance networks can increase their transparency and accountability (Sørensen, 2007).

One of the major barriers for increasing the transparency and accountability of governance networks, however, is the narrow perception of the media on where and how politics is performed. The narrow media focus on the traditional political institutions of representative democracy means that they show little

interest in the political role of governance networks. The effect is a low level of publicity and, hence, limited transparency and accountability of formal as well as informal governance networks.

Governance Networks and Elected Politicians

When focusing on the role of elected politicians, the relationship between governance networks and representative democracy is best understood within the transitional conjecture as the increased institutionalization of the role of governance networks goes hand in hand with a gradual transformation of the role of elected politicians. Hence, the role of national as well as municipal politicians has gradually been redefined from that of sovereign decision makers to metagovernors who govern through the framing of different forms of self-governance, with network governance being one of them (Berg, 2000; Sørensen, 2006). This new image of what it means to be a politician, which is, among other things, promoted by the new public management doctrine, suggests that politicians should not get involved in details and concrete governance affairs. Rather, they should concentrate on defining the overall political and budgetary goals that self-governing actors should pursue. The power of this new ideal typical image of what it means to be a good politician is illuminated by the fact that there are strong criticisms of politicians for being too occupied by detail and concrete governance issues. In the Danish context, the current efforts to reformulate the role of national and local politicians has led to a considerable reduction in their influence on public policy processes. This is because the character and amount of the resources that Danish politicians have access to in their effort to exercise metagovernance are limited, leaving considerable space for the public administrators (Sørensen, 2006).

Conclusion

The strong tradition of close cooperation between public authorities and civil society and the presence of strong constitutionally ensured local political institutions has led to the formation of a plurality of national and local governance networks that function as a supplement to the national and local institutions of representative democracy. However, the recent growth in the number and importance of governance networks has to an increasing extent transformed the institutions of representative democracy through a gradual reinterpretation of the role of public authorities from that of being sovereign decision makers into being metagovernors that govern at a distance and leaves considerable autonomy to self-regulating governance networks and institutions. Seen from a transitional perspective on democracy, the development of a new role to politicians is promising, but it is problematic that Danish

politicians seem to end up playing a marginal role in the metagovernance of governance networks and that the transparency and accountability of many governance networks tend to be relatively low.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the democratic anchorage of governance networks in four European countries confirms that there is substantial cross-national variation in the relationship between governance networks and representative institutions (see Table 4). In the United Kingdom, governance networks are used by the central state for its own purposes to deliver public policy locally with only marginal reference to elected representatives. In Switzerland, although governance networks operate in the shadow of consociationalism and largely outside public scrutiny, elected officials do have important influence over these networks through oversight of budgetary processes. In the Netherlands, governance networks have evolved over time to become an increasingly important element of pluralist policy making and implementation but so far retaining a clear link to democratic authorities for purposes of accountability. In Denmark, governance networks have become institutionalized as coproducers of policy and services, and there is a productive relationship between representative and participatory democracy.

The case studies also highlight the importance of the varying national context in shaping the democratic anchorage of governance networks. The focus on two elements of democratic milieu—namely, patterns of democracy and the strength of associationalism—allows us to establish the degree of cross-national variation more systematically. First, it seems that the relationship of governance networks to representative institutions is strongly shaped by what Lijphart (1999) called patterns of democracy. There are striking parallels between Switzerland and the Netherlands: Both countries are traditionally characterized by consociationalism. Power sharing is widespread, and governance networks have been worked into the traditional views and practices of cooperative policy making between the state, corporate interests and civil society actors. A similar situation is found in Denmark, where governance networks are rooted in a long-standing means of enhancing state–civil society cooperation. In these three countries, governance networks are not considered incompatible with preexisting patterns of decision making and policy delivery. Governance networks are nothing new in this respect; they simply extend preexisting practices into new areas and blend well with existing patterns of democracy. The United Kingdom presents a totally different picture. There, the emergence of governance networks is a result of a top-down modernization agenda by the national government, soon supported by a convergence of interest at the subnational level (involving local politicians, public officials,

Table 4. Governance Networks and Representative Democracy: Comparative Analysis of Four European Countries

	United Kingdom	Switzerland	Netherlands	Denmark
Governance networks in pattern of democracy	Governance networks creatures of top-down modernisation strategy by new national government.	Governance network blend into traditional patterns of consociationalism and subsidiarity.	Gradual evolution from mid- twentieth century from pillarized decision structures to sectoral networks and now to governance networks and interactive decision making.	Governance networks longstanding means of enhancing cooperation between strong state and civil society. Increasing enthusiasm for networks from 1980s.
Governance network and associationalism	Weak associationalism puts governmental actors into advantage and allows instrumentalization of governance networks.	In spite of weak associationalism, governance networks successfully resist attempts of instrumentalization.	Governance networks, thanks to strong associationalism, contribute to increased pluralism. But tensions exist with recent tendencies to strengthen political leadership and representative institutions.	Context of strong civil society conducive to increased citizen participation through governance networks.

The power of elected politicians	Variable and limited democratic oversight. Elected politicians are marginal to governance networks/partnerships. May have broad oversight role, but key actors are public managers working with considerable discretion but within broad political mandate.	Democratic oversight through institutions and direct democracy at the end of decision processes. Elected politicians resist metagoverning role and continue to interfere in governance networks.	Democratic oversight through representative institutions at the end of the decision process. Politicians have limited though important roles in governance networks. Most significance paid to role of public managers in securing good processes for interactive decision making.	New Public Management implies changed role for elected politicians to meta-governors and new form of representative democracy. Experience of metagovernance reveals more limited role for elected politicians and increased role for administrators.
Relevant conjectures	Instrumental conjecture offers main explanation both for origin of governance networks and their relationship to representative institutions.	Complementary conjecture offers plausible account for the origin of governance networks as well as for the relationship with representative institutions.	Complementary conjecture explains origins of governance networks. Transitional conjecture explains relationship to representative institutions with incompatibility conjecture a possibility if tensions between governance networks and representative democracy not resolved in process of transition.	Complementary conjecture explains origins of governance networks. Relationship to representative institutions suggests transitional conjecture more relevant. Marginality of elected officials causes concern in relation to future democratic anchorage.

business, community, and nonprofits). In contrast to the three other countries, governance networks there are something new; they disrupt the usual pattern of decision making, centered on power concentration at the level of (national) representative institutions.

Second, the relationship between governance networks and representative institutions also appears to be shaped by the vibrancy of the associational nexus that also varies across countries. There are, again, interesting similarities and differences. Particularly striking is the case of the United Kingdom, where weak associationalism has resulted in a limited ability of governance networks to resist instrumentalization by the government's modernization agenda. Attempts to instrumentalize governance networks were also discernible in Switzerland, which is equally characterized by weak associationalism. In both cases, the government provided funds for capacity building (i.e., to help create nongovernmental actors from scratch) to associate them into governance networks. The case studies suggest that instrumentalization succeeded in the United Kingdom but not in Switzerland. While less discernible in the Netherlands or in Denmark, attempts at instrumentalization have not succeeded there either. Although in Switzerland successful resistance of governance networks to instrumentalization is basically due to the weakness of governmental actors, in the Netherlands and Denmark, it can be attributed to the strength of the civil society.

Taken together, these two contextual factors interact to produce peculiar relationships between governance networks and representative institutions. In the United Kingdom, the instrumental conjecture prevails. Although democratic oversight is limited, the power of elected politicians does not seem to be very much at stake, thanks to power concentration at the level of (national) representative institutions that behave as higher-order metagovernors and, due to associational weakness, are able to effectively instrumentalize governance networks. At the other end of the spectrum, governance networks in Switzerland appear to be just another locus of consociational power sharing. Switzerland's situation is due to the weakness of representative institutions—in the wider context of consensual patterns of decision making—and the weakness of governance networks due to weak associationalism. This explains why the complementarity conjecture prevails. In the two other cases, the Netherlands and Denmark, governance networks play an important role in a more general transformation of decision-making patterns. In both countries, strong associationalism can be seen as a major driver for this transformation. In the Netherlands, strong governance networks in the context of a negotiating state facilitated tendencies toward pluralism and helped to break up corporatist decision making. In Denmark, the growing importance of governance networks and the involvement of civil-society actors into policy making relates to a more general process of transforming Danish democracy altogether. In both countries, the transitional conjecture

prevails, as governance networks were strong enough to transform decision making and redefine democratic practice.

These results from the four country studies also allow us to draw conclusions on the accuracy of the hypotheses formulated in the theoretical section regarding the likeliness of the four conjectures to occur in different democratic milieus. More precisely, we find that in a context of weak associationalism, the instrumental conjecture is likely to prevail in majoritarian democracies (United Kingdom) and the complementary conjecture in consensual democracies (Switzerland). In a context of strong associationalism (Denmark and the Netherlands), governance networks contribute to redefining and transforming democratic decision making and thus make the transitional conjecture more likely. In the cases under scrutiny here, the prevailing transitional conjecture certainly has to do with the background of the consensual patterns of power sharing that is present in both countries. Hence, we are as yet unable to assess whether, in a majoritarian democracy characterized by strong associationalism, the incompatibility conjecture is more likely than any other. Nevertheless, the analysis of the Netherlands can be viewed as a case in point (more majoritarian than Denmark) as the case study suggests that here, the incompatibility conjecture, although not prevailing, is present to some extent, as people call for stronger leadership by democratically elected politicians.

This four-country analysis has also revealed the dynamic nature of the context or democratic milieu in which governance networks operate. This has implications for the relationship between governance networks and democratic anchorage as indicated by the conjectural possibilities associated with the current and future conditions identified for each of our cases. Interestingly, the case studies show how countries operating in very different political contexts (United Kingdom and Switzerland) offer the same combination of conjectures (instrumental and complementary) and how countries with rather longer experience of governance networks but more similar political cultures (Denmark and the Netherlands) share concerns about the potential end point of the developments in governance networks, that is, the possibility that the transitional position will lead to incompatibility if matters of democratic anchorage cannot be addressed.

The normative implication of our study is that researchers into modes of governance need to pay more attention to the contextual features of the empirical cases they are studying and, in so doing, to frame their conclusions with reference to relevant features of that context. Context is often used as a residual category to explain that which cannot be explained otherwise. We define context in a particular way—as the democratic milieu—and thus enable it to have more analytical purchase. Our article shows one way in which context could be included in cross-national comparative research, but there are other possibilities that draw on the rich interpretivist tradition in the study of public policy and governance.

NOTE

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